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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003133

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SUBJECT: CODEL BAUCUS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT TALABANI

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a September 15 meeting with Codel Baucus, President Talabani said that while Maliki is not the ideal Prime Minister for Iraq, the August 26 Leaders' Agreement and creation of the "three plus one mechanism" and an inner Cabinet are genuine steps forward. He acknowledged, however, that implementation of the agreement is the real key to progress. Talabani said he believes national reconciliation is possible, but the U.S. must pressure not only PM Maliki, but VP Hashimi as well, to cooperate. Talabani said that Congressional timelines would not necessarily help, because they encourage the extremists to simply wait it out until the U.S. leaves Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Ken Salazar (D-CO), Ben Nelson (D-NE), and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) met with President Talabani on September 15 to discuss national reconciliation and other issues. Senator Baucus began the meeting by asking Talabani to assess the likelihood of the GOI achieving reconciliation. Talabani began with an overview of events from the time of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) until today, commenting that the U.S. had made two major mistakes: not forming an Iraqi interim government instead of the CPA, and turning into an occupation army. However, he continued, Iraqis eventually started to build Iraq in a participatory way, creating the Presidency Council, and ensuring that there was representation by Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds in major offices such as the PM, and Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Council of Representatives. Gradually, the Sunnis realized that the U.S. is not the enemy -- Iran is the enemy -- and so now the Sunnis are cooperating in Anbar, Diyala, Salahadin, Mosul, and elsewhere. Talabani added that there has been a change in the Shia mindset as well, towards wanting more alliances with the U.S.

¶3. (C) In answer to a question from Senator Salazar about the dysfunctionality of the GOI, Talabani said the problem is that there is no real deal between the parties. The Sunnis hold positions in the government, but feel that they don't really have any say. "Maliki is not the ideal Prime Minister for Iraq," Talabani admitted, "but he is the best we can depend on." If Maliki resigned, there would be a vacuum of many months leading to chaos in the country, Talabani predicted.

¶4. (C) Talabani emphasized the importance of the August 26 Leaders' Agreement, saying that establishment of the "three plus one" mechanism (the President and two VPs, plus the PM) and creation of a small "inner Cabinet" within the Council of Ministers that includes members from all parties represent a step towards collective leadership for the government. He acknowledged that implementation of the Leaders' Agreement is the key, saying that if that happens, "we can bring Sunnis back to the Cabinet and improve its work." However, that is

a big "if," he admitted.

¶5. (C) Senator Snowe noted that the U.S. surge was premised on the GOI achieving certain goals, in particular national reconciliation. Talabani said that national reconciliation is possible, with some kind of U.S. role and pressure on both sides, not just on Maliki. He pointed to the example of the joint committee to prepare the de-Baathification, provincial powers, and hydro-carbons law, saying that the Sunni IIP members on the committee signed off on the consensus on the laws, but when they went to the IIP leaders, the leaders refused to approve the agreement. "It is not only Maliki who needs pressure," Talabani said, eventually mentioning Sunni Vice President Tarik al-Hashimi by name as the other candidate for pressure.

¶6. (C) There are many different Sunnis in Tawafuq, Talabani noted, and moderate parties can play a positive role. The leaders who signed the August 26 agreement are moderates, he pointed out, adding that altogether the moderates have a big majority in the Council of Representatives. However, he said, the moderates must all work together, and "one problem is with the Prime Minister, the other is with IIP." We must bring both to the table and convince them to work together in a reasonable way, he said, and the U.S. should pressure both Maliki and Hashimi to cooperate with each other. If they do, we can have a unity government and move forward, Talabani concluded. A few months ago, he noted, Hashimi was correct in saying that Maliki was not cooperating with the Presidency Council (Talabani and VPs Hashimi and Adel Abdul Mehdi). "We three had a discussion with Maliki," Talabani explained. "We said we don't accept your style, and we arranged the three plus one (mechanism)," to which Maliki agreed. Maliki and Hashimi had lost trust in each other, Talabani said, and "I

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am always bringing them together, acting as a mediator. We need U.S. help."

¶7. (C) Talabani said that Congressional timelines would not necessarily help, because they encourage the extremists to simply wait it out until the U.S. leaves Iraq. Timelines must be done in a way that does not encourage terrorists, he stressed. Senator Baucus noted that there is much feeling in the U.S. that if there are no timelines, there will be no progress by the GOI. Talabani responded that the U.S. needs to pressure Maliki. However, he said, discussion in Congress does help Iraq, even when it consists of criticism.

¶8. (U) Codel Baucus did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before their departure.  
BUTENIS